

**OPENING REMARKS**

**BY**

**H.E. MR. COLLEN V. KELAPILE  
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC  
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)**

**AT THE**

**HIGH-LEVEL THEMATIC ROUNDTABLE ON STRENGTHENING  
HEALTH RESPONSES AND PREPAREDNESS**

**DURING THE 78<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)**

**23 MAY 2022  
14:30 – 15:00 HOURS**

**UN CONFERENCE CENTRE – ESCAP HALL  
BANGKOK, THAILAND**

*Please check against delivery.*

- **Madam Executive Secretary;**
- **H.E. Ms. Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia;**
- **H.E. Ms. Helen Clark, 37<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of New Zealand, Former Administrator UNDP and Co-Chair, Independent Panel on Pandemic Preparedness;**
- **Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist, World Health Organization;**
- **Excellencies;**
- **Distinguished Delegates;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

1. At the outset, I wish to commend the organizers for convening this **“High-Level Thematic Roundtable on Strengthening Health Responses and Preparedness.”** The COVID-19 pandemic with its attendant devastating socio-economic impacts heightened calls for strengthening health responses and preparedness.

2. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inequalities within and between countries in access to vaccines, medicines, and diagnostics. To address this challenge, the United Nations General Assembly convened the **31<sup>st</sup> Special Session in Response to the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic** from 3-4 December 2020.
3. To ensure that the world is better prepared for the next pandemic, the World Health Assembly in May 2020 established an Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response.
4. In addition, the World Health Organization took a decision on the negotiation of a convention, agreement or other international instrument to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.
5. I am delighted that the Asia-Pacific region is also playing a critical role in strengthening health responses and preparedness.

6. Through the ESCAP Commission, Member States in Asia and the Pacific region adopted Resolution 77/1 in 2021, which recognizes the importance of all countries to have universal, equitable, timely access to quality, safe, efficacious and affordable diagnosis, therapeutics, medicines, vaccines and essential health technologies.
7. Above all, the Asia-Pacific region has adopted good practices for ensuring equitable and affordable access to essential health products, such as COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

8. It is gratifying to observe that multilateral initiatives such as the COVAX Facility has provided a lifeline for countries in the Asia-Pacific region through the supply of vaccines.
9. The ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on ASEAN Vaccine Security and Self-Reliance is another good practice

that promotes collaboration among Member States in fighting the pandemic.

10. The establishment of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Asia-Pacific Vaccine Access Facility has offered rapid and equitable support to its developing Member Countries to procure and deliver effective and safe vaccines.
11. It is encouraging that the bilateral agreements signed by Asia-Pacific countries on vaccine manufacturing, distribution and delivery have complemented regional and global efforts to strengthen health responses and preparedness.
12. The COVID-19 pandemic responses have contributed to substantial advances in digital health in many countries.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

13. I would like to outline some of the priority areas recommended for equitable access to vaccine and therapeutics.

14. The first priority is to speed up manufacturing, distribution, and redistribution of effective and safe vaccines in large supplies, with long shelf-life and without earmarks in a transparent, accountable, and equitable way, and follow an emergency style mode of operation.
15. The second priority is to increase COVAX vaccine supply and provide larger vaccine shipments to receiver facilities in a transparent way.
16. The third priority is to transform the COVAX mechanism from a market and charity model to a global public investment and global public goods model.
17. The fourth priority is to ensure vaccination programmes are accompanied by faster production and distribution of more accurate diagnostics and more effective and affordable treatments.
18. The fifth priority is to ensure that there is real-time monitoring and evaluation of progress in

administering vaccines to allow for timely adjustments to more comprehensive strategies and plans.

19. The sixth priority is to build regional hubs for the development and manufacture of vaccines or to strengthen the existing ones.
20. The seventh priority is to increase public-private partnerships in vaccine development, manufacturing and distribution; and scaling up exchanges and transfer of knowledge, know-how, technology and resources between countries to achieve vaccine self-sufficiency.
21. The eighth priority is to promote policy coherence through regulatory and normative systems to achieve quality and standards concerning health and economic policies, science and innovation, population, and health.
22. The ninth priority is to apply a whole-of-government and whole-of society approach in providing universal

health coverage, with equal access to quality, comprehensive, connected and affordable health care; develop more agile, anticipatory, and adaptive health systems with the involvement of local communities. Such health infrastructure will facilitate more comprehensive, rapid and responsive immunization campaigns in the future.

23. The tenth priority is to address the many dimensions and determinants of health and the triple burden of diseases through multisectoral actions for health, with primary health care at the centre.
24. Lastly, high-level political leadership and commitment is needed to make access to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics more equitable.
25. The current pandemic offers us a chance to define and make vaccines a global public good and to strengthen universal health care with the ultimate goal of health and wellbeing for all and of building back better.

26. I look forward to your enriching deliberations on this important subject.

**I thank you for your kind attention.**